



NEWS

Four Corners Air Quality Task Force



Colorado Department
of Public Health
and Environment

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Four Corners Air Quality Task Force Readies Series of Draft Mitigation Options; Quarterly Meeting Set for Cortez on August 9

Cortez, Colorado – The first sets of draft mitigation options for addressing region-wide air quality concerns will be a topic of discussion at the next regular quarterly meeting of the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force, set to convene in Cortez on Wednesday, August 9. The four-hour meeting will begin at 3 p.m. at the Cortez Conference Center, 2121 East Main Street.

Drafting teams created earlier this year already have drafted papers that will be included in the Task Force's final report, due by the end of 2007. Topics include emissions from engines used in oil and gas development activities and recommendations for ambient air monitoring for pollutants, including ammonia monitoring in the region. All draft documents are available for review at the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force website (<http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/4C/index.html>) under the [Documents](#) link.

"We're really excited about the draft mitigation options papers that are coming out of the work groups," said Margie Perkins, director of the Air Pollution Control Division of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. "These mark the first concrete work product from the Task Force that would not have been created if this group had not been formed. Previously, we've worked on identifying the relevant issues and mapping out how we were going to get from Point A to Point B. These drafts are something we can take to the public at-large to show them what we are accomplishing."

Perkins also expressed excitement about new air quality monitors in the region that began sampling for ammonia last month in Colorado and New Mexico.

"The ammonia monitoring is a direct result of concerns expressed by members of the Task Force early on in the process," Perkins said. "A need was identified based upon the important role ammonia can play in visibility impairment, and that computer models examining visibility issues would be more accurate if ammonia data were available. A number of agencies and the Southern Ute Tribe are participating. We're pleased to see this new monitoring all come together."

Much of the Task Force's focus to date has been on engine emissions associated with oil and gas development. In the coming months, however, the overall Task Force report will grow to include mitigation options that address power plant emissions and emissions from other sources like transportation. The draft report will be updated on an on-going basis to reflect additions and revisions. Updates to the draft report will be posted regularly on the Task Force website.

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The Four Corners Air Quality Task Force consists of federal land managers; federal and state environmental regulators; representatives from industry and tribal nations; and interested residents from the affected states of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah.

The first public meeting was held in Farmington, New Mexico in November 2005. Subsequent quarterly meetings have been held in Farmington; Durango, Colorado; and now, Cortez. The Cortez meeting location was picked because of input from Task Force members.

In between meetings, five standing work groups conduct conference calls on issues related to oil and gas development; power plants; other air pollution emission sources; cumulative effects; and air quality monitoring.

The Cortez meeting will follow a format similar to the one introduced at previous meetings. A brief introductory session is planned for the entire Task Force before work groups break out for concurrent sessions. The entire Task Force will reconvene for a plenary session before the meeting is adjourned.

The introductory session usually includes a relevant presentation or two by Task Force members on emerging issues. In Cortez, a presentation on mercury is planned.

"Mercury is an important public health issue that is likely to be with us for a long time," said Mark McMillan, the Mercury Program Manager for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment who will be making the presentation in Cortez. "The Four Corners Air Quality Task Force has a unique opportunity to further our understanding of this problem and perhaps to begin to identify effective reduction strategies."

The Task Force and its meetings have emerged as a forum for the affected states, tribes, federal land managers, industry, and residents of the Four Corners Region to discuss regional air quality issues. Originally convened by representatives from the states of Colorado and New Mexico, the concept behind the Task Force is that a broad and inclusive collaborative air quality planning process will allow the region to meet the needs of a growing population while preserving air quality and the environment.

While organizers have been pleased with the Task Force's progress during 2006, they hope citizens will become more involved.

"We've had great involvement from regulators and industry, and from some citizens as well," said Mary Uhl, bureau chief for the Air Quality Bureau of the New Mexico Environment Department. "However, we'd really like to see even more involvement from residents in the region. They have a perspective that is vital if what the Task Force is doing is going to move from discussions and reports to real actions that will benefit air quality."

A feature of the quarterly Task Force meeting in Cortez is a "field trip" open to all task force members. A visit to Mesa Verde National Park is planned the day after the meeting on Thursday, August 10. Mesa Verde is an ideal location to observe what visibility conditions are like in the Four Corners region. Field Trip participants also will have a chance to see some air quality monitoring equipment.

Previously, some Task Force members have taken field trips to tour oil and gas sites in the region and the Four Corners Power Plant near Farmington.

"We're inviting task force members to come along with us to Mesa Verde," Uhl said.

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Task Force members interested in participating in the trip to Mesa Verde should contact Mark Jones of the New Mexico Environment Department at 505-327-6854 or Mark.Jones@state.nm.us.

Individuals wanting to learn more about the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force should contact either Christopher Dann (Colorado residents) at 303-692-3281 or christopher.dann@state.co.us, or Mark Jones (New Mexico residents). Information also may be obtained by visiting the Task Force's website at <http://www.nmenv.state.nm.us/aqb/4C/index.html>.

The next regular quarterly meeting of the Four Corners Air Quality Task Force after the Cortez session is slated for Wednesday, November 8, 2006, in Farmington, New Mexico at the Courtyard (Marriott) Farmington.